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ABSTRACT

Without the development of reading fluency as part of reading instruction, teachers may end up with a classroom full of students who read roughly and slowly, and who may not completely gather the important information from the text. One strategy to increase fluency is the fluency development lesson (FDL) that includes seven steps modeled by the teacher and takes only about 10-15 minutes. Another strategy is that of repeated readings. Still other strategies that can be incorporated into the reading program include direct instruction and feedback, support during reading, and the use of easy materials. Strategies used to increase fluency also have the potential to impact reading comprehension; according to Nathan and Stanovich (1991), reading fluency is critically intertwined with reading comprehension. As stated by Fowler (1993), comprehension and fluency will both improve if approximation is accepted, and rereading can be used to promote a closer match to the actual text. One critical factor in developing reading skills and fluency is the involvement of parents. Nathan and Stanovich (1991) have this to say on parent involvement and adult modeling: "teachers who read themselves, read aloud to children, and encourage children to read are cornerstones of healthy, literate environments that promote reading fluency." (NKA)

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Reading Fluency: A Critical Component of Reading Instruction

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Introduction

It's a sunny afternoon as the students return from lunch recess to relax in the classroom anticipating today's story that the teacher will read aloud to them. As the teacher reads the story he is modeling the skills of a good reader to his students. The students listen and enjoy the story as it is read smoothly and accurately without frequent pauses to sound out words. Of these skills being modeled by the teacher, reading fluency is undoubtedly very important. According to Rasinski (1989), reading fluency is the smooth and natural oral production of written text. As the text is read smoothly and naturally by the teacher, it is more enjoyable, and the information in the text is easier to listen to, understand, and comprehend for students.

Without the development of reading fluency as part of the process of reading instruction, teachers may end up with a classroom full of students who read roughly and slowly. As a result, students may not completely gather the important information from the text. The question that one might ask is this, are there specific techniques or strategies available for teachers to implement in their classroom that will assist their students in the development of greater reading fluency? As students pass through the grades and eventually graduate and go out into the real world, reading fluency is a skill of absolute necessity that they must possess.

Major Issues

Concerns

If students are struggling to develop reading fluency, what can their teachers do to assist them in increasing their reading fluency? Despite the

knowledge that reading fluency is a crucial component of literacy development for all children, and the fact that experimental instructional efforts in fluency have been positive, few detailed models of literacy instruction for the whole classroom are out there for teachers to implement (Rasinski, et al., 1994). If literacy is such an important element in reading instruction, it is ridiculous that this area is basically ignored and the fact that few models exist. With the lack of models available, the syndrome of the poor getting poorer creeps up. As stated by Nathan & Stanovich (1991), Non fluent word recognition results in unrewarding experiences that lead to less involvement in reading related activities. This statement sums it up precisely. If you aren't good at something and as a result don't enjoy it, you are going to do it less or not at all. When a student doesn't enjoy reading and is not good at it, why do it? As a result, the poor reader becomes a poorer reader.

Fluency Strategies

Although there are very few formal models in existence to increase reading fluency, strategies do exist for teachers to implement in their classrooms. The first of these strategies to be discussed, the fluency development lesson (FDL), was developed by Rasinski et al. (1994). The FDL is a simple strategy that includes the following steps:

1. Teacher introduces text and asks for predictions.
2. Teacher models fluent oral reading of text to class.
3. Teacher leads class discussion of text content and discusses teacher techniques for fluent reading.
4. Teacher leads whole class in choral readings.

5. Teacher divides class into pairs/small groups for reciprocal reading, feedback, and support.
6. Teacher regroups class and asks volunteers to perform reading for class.
7. Students place text into folder for future practice and sharing with parents.

Following the implementation of the treatment strategy, Rasinski, et al. (1994) found greater gains in instructional reading level and reading rates in the experimental treatment group. The whole lesson in the FDL strategy only required 10 - 15 minutes with a group second graders. With such a simple procedure and positive results, the FDL should be considered a valuable tool in the development of reading fluency.

Another strategy one may consider in an attempt to increase student reading fluency is that of repeated readings. As stated by Rasinski (1989), "research has shown that repetition is most effective when students meet target words in a variety of texts or through repeated exposures to one text." Repeated reading is basically reading a passage again and again until reading progresses smoothly (Fowler, 1993). Dahl (1979) in Fowler (1993) found that repeated reading greatly enhanced decoding, and that reading speed was increased by 50% with errors cut in half. Speed and accuracy were also enhanced through repeated reading. The strategy of repeated reading is simplistic and requires no special tools of training on the part of the teacher. Samuels (1979), in Rasinski et al. (1994), "found that the gains made in word recognition, reading rate, and comprehension through repeated readings of one

text transferred to passages unfamiliar to the reader." If word recognition, reading rate, and comprehension can be enhanced through repeated interactions with a passage, and requires very little extra effort on the part of the teacher, teachers should allow opportunities for repeated readings in their reading programs.

Still other strategies that can be incorporated into one's reading program include direct instruction and feedback, support during reading, and the use of easy materials. First, direct instruction and feedback involves the teacher reminding the class to listen to the expression in the teachers voice, the reading rate, and any stops and pauses that occur. This is followed by the students reading the passage orally and the teacher giving feedback to students to facilitate growth (Rasinski, 1989). Next, support during reading is achieved through the student hearing a fluent rendition of a passage while simultaneously reading the same. Support types could include choral reading or the use of a tape recorded passage for listening while reading (Rasinski, 1989). Finally, the use of easy materials help students develop a feeling of power while they are in command of the text. Rasinski (1989) writes fluency is best promoted when students are provided with materials they find easy in terms of word recognition, phrasing, expression, and the comprehensibility of the text.

Fluency Strategies and Comprehension

Strategies used to increase reading fluency also have the potential to impact reading comprehension. According to Nathan (1991), reading fluency is critically intertwined with reading comprehension. One strategy through

which fluency and comprehension may be increased is accepting approximations. As stated by Fowler (1993), comprehension and fluency will both improve if we remember to accept approximation, and rereading can be used to promote a closer match to the actual text. As students gain more practice and are able to recognize more words, reading will become easier for them. Topping (1987) in Rasinski et al. (1994),

> Reported that training parents to read one text orally and simultaneously each day with their children resulted in gains of three to five times what normally would have been expected in word recognition and comprehension.

Reading fluency is a necessary ingredient in reading comprehension as the reader is not struggling with decoding the text but, hopefully, internalizing it. Nathan (1991) mentions that when word recognition takes little capacity, most of the readers cognitive capacity can be focused on the comprehension of text, criticizing it, elaborating and reflecting on it. In short, doing all the things good readers do.

Conclusions and Recommendations

If students are to become good readers, they must possess the qualities of a good reader. Harris & Hodges (1981) in Rasinski, et al. (1994) define fluency as the ability to read smoothly, easily, and readily with freedom from word recognition problems and dealing with words with quickness. The spotlight for this summary has been reading fluency. As was found in the research, several techniques are ready for implementation by teachers to increase reading fluency. Many of these techniques are already in use throughout classrooms.

The techniques in this summary included:

1. Fluency Development Lesson (FDL) (Rasinski, et al., 1994).
2. Repeated readings (Rasinski, 1989) and (Fowler, 1994).
3. Direct instruction and feedback (Rasinski, 1989).
4. Support during reading (Rasinski, 1989).
5. Easy materials (Rasinski, 1989).

The above techniques are examples of what can be used to help students increase their reading skills, but one that was not mentioned, except for the introduction, was that of adult modeling and parent involvement.

One critical factor in developing reading skills and fluency is the involvement of parents. According to the National PTA in the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs, "over 30 years of research has proven beyond dispute the positive connection between parent involvement and student success." Cullinan (1989) in Nathan (1991) reminds us that children need adults who share their literacy heritage and lead children into literacy. What better adult for the job than the one closest to the child, the parents? Other supporters of adult involvement are Teale & Sulzby (1986), in Nathan (1991) when they wrote that "those who are read to, but are not early readers, are more likely to learn to read with ease when formal instruction does begin." It is critical that influential adults in a child's life be involved in he child's reading development, one such adult that students see for approximately 180 days of the year is their teacher. According to Rasinski (1989), since the most fluent reader the classroom is the teacher, the teacher should be the primary model and daily periods should be set aside for teachers

(or other fluent readers) to read aloud. One final piece on parent involvement and adult modeling is the fact that "teachers who read themselves, read aloud to children, and encourage children to read are cornerstones of healthy, literate environments that promote reading fluency" (Nathan and Stanovich, 1991).

The final area for this summary is one that teachers may not have considered and may have a hard time hearing. That area is simply giving up some control over your students. In fact, Fowler (1993) writes something that some may not like when she says that "... fluency in reading cannot be taught by a method, or accomplished by the teacher. The reader must be in control to become fluent." After analyzing this quote one realizes that it is totally true. To become a fluent reader, or good at anything, one must be in control. Fowler (1993) closes her research, as the author will this summary, with the following; "Teachers must be willing to turn over ownership and release control of the reading activity to the student. We must be willing to let our students risk success."

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